<Book Reviews>Rachmi Diyah Larasati. The Dance That Makes You Vanish: Cultural Reconstruction in Post-Genocide Indonesia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013, xxii+196pp.

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The Dance That Makes You Vanish: Cultural Reconstruction in Post-Genocide Indonesia

Rachmi Diyah Larasati

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In the decades following the violent mass annihilation of suspected Communist sympathizers and members of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia) during Suharto's coup d'état (1965–66) and subsequent New Order regime (1965–98), there was a systematic suppression of information concerning the events and killings surrounding this period. Rachmi Diyah Larasati's *The Dance That Makes You Vanish*: *Cultural Reconstruction in Post-Genocide Indonesia* is one of the several recent accounts of these events surfacing after decades of silence. Larasati provides an intensely personal testimony of the indoctrination and erasure that defined Suharto's regime, one that violently stamped out "unclean" bodies that were seen as conflicting with the New Order while propping up dogmatic actors in the state's nationalist agenda. The author's positionality provides a unique account of these events and the role that Indonesian traditional dance and wider arts culture played in the process. Larasati's own family is full of artists who disappeared during the New Order, many of whom were killed for their vague connections to leftist ideology, especially those affiliated with the feminist organization known as Gerwani. The value of the insight provided by Larasati's firsthand experience as a member of this artistic family, as a dancer, and as a state-sponsored cultural ambassador herself cannot be overstated.

During the New Order years, state-sponsored censorship was employed to closely monitor the arts, with government officials hired to oversee and mandate guidelines on approved performance characteristics that would erase any association of Communism. Many of these performance guidelines reflected a Javanese hegemony, patriarchy, and exoticized promotion of a unified Indonesia, especially with regard to the image of the female dancing body. The government routinely spread propaganda stories of non-government-approved female dancers performing for the pleasure of male Communist organizers, thus claiming that many of the female dancers were morally depraved. According to Larasati, female dancers became convenient scapegoats, sensationalized as part of a justification for the perpetuation of violence against supposed left-aligned individuals.

Throughout the book, Larasati presents the state-sanctioned female dancing body as a paradox, one that replicates a culturally reconstructed version of the ideal Indonesian citizen while simultaneously providing a potential platform for subversion, as the dancers become cultural ambassadors of Indonesia on the international stage. She considers those who occupy this post-national space as having a "third body," where "women in alliance with the state are more likely to be granted access to negotiate their mobility, in some sense because of their 'usefulness' within the system that co-opts them" (p. 133). As these individuals transcend the national context, they "embrace the global stage" and in turn gain a new position to resist the co-optative force that

elevated them to such a status (p. 133). Larasati herself enjoys such a platform that allows her to transcend New Order politics as an academic working in the United States in the post-Suharto years. While she acknowledges her own position as trading one hegemonic force for another, her appointment in Western academia continues to provide her with the ability to raise awareness concerning not only the atrocities in Indonesia, but of the United States' support for the Indonesian government during the Cold War—and thus its complicity in the violence that killed a "minimum of hundreds of thousands of citizens" (p. 163).

This book is presented with a fast-paced and condensed urgency, leaving the reader wanting more from the captivating ethnographic data. However, many of Larasati's research participants were wary to discuss the events in question for fear of retaliation even many years after the fall of the New Order regime. As she notes, during interviews, some participants "simply refused to respond or react in any way at all" (p. xx). Furthermore, each chapter has the potential for significant expansion, but presenting the analysis in such a concise manner provides an emergent account that is accessible and ripe to inspire further work on the subject.

The introductory chapter frames the state's patronage of court dances such as *bedhaya* as a perpetuation of an Indonesian patriarchy, as most of the dancers were female and the choreographers male, as well as fulfilling the "West's desire for Indonesian exoticism" during international performances. The author also argues that folk dances, such as *gandrung*, *tayub*, and *jathilan*, were silenced in favor of elevated forms of court dance that unified Indonesia under an imagined Javanese hegemonic identity situated in ancient court traditions. The author frames her work around the idea that these reconstructed versions of dance traditions silenced important village traditions, many practitioners of which were killed during the anti-Communist purge. This chapter's subtitle is "Dancing on the Mass Grave," referring to state-sponsored performers dancing on the graves of those traditions silenced and individuals killed.

In Chapter 1, "To Remember Differently: Paradoxical Statehood and Preserved Value," Larasati describes the state's use of the female body to present a peaceful, exoticized image of Indonesia to the world. She notes that "[m]any of those affected by the New Order's massive societal recategorization were artists, a large percentage of whom were female" (p. 5). Many of these women were identified with Gerwani and the artists' guild known as Lekra (the People's Cultural Institution) and were thus considered Communist enemies of the state. These groups were considered leftist because of their feminist and socialist leanings. Artists deemed acceptable by the New Order were recruited to perform state-sanctioned versions of dances. Strikingly, through a vague familial connection to the air force, Larasati herself was able to gain "clean" status as a state dancer despite her wider familial connections to leftist organizations.

Larasati begins Chapter 2 with a sensationalized military report of sexual misconduct by dancers and male patrons during a Communist meeting, revealing the degree to which the government was willing to exploit female dancers in order to promote its agenda. This chapter, "What Is

Left: The Fabricated and the Illicit," discusses ways that the Suharto government propagated anti-Communist attitudes among citizens by turning "unruly" bodies, such as the female dancing body, into scapegoats (p. 32). The author argues that these bodies were "made into convenient, corporeal symbols of the ongoing 'evil' against which the New Order claimed its legitimacy as protector and representative of the idealized nation" (p. 32). She recalls propaganda films shown to her as a school-age child, those intended to fabricate a cultural memory to justify the actions by the government and to cover up the extent of the mass atrocities perpetuated by the Suharto regime. This cultural reconstruction was intended to exert a dominance over cultural identity formation, a reforming of cultural memory that included the performance of specific kinds of dance traditions. The author reveals how the female dancing body was used as a way to demonstrate the difference between an ideal Indonesian citizen and an unruly one.

In Chapter 3, "Historicizing Violence: Memory and the Transmission of the Aesthetic," Larasati describes ways that dancers circumvented the state's ideological gerrymandering through state-sponsored dance, not by overt political protest but through small-scale, village, and family-oriented transmission that "implanted fragments of unrestrained 'memory' in the minds and movements of many young dancers" (p. 61). These practices are especially important given the significant risk of violence that taking such a stance could elicit. In this chapter I was left wanting more details concerning Larasati's family members who risked their lives to transmit important cultural expression. With this book as an important beginning, perhaps more ethnographic details of these courageous individuals will surface as the years since the New Order progress and such testimonies become safer to expose.

The next chapter, "Staging Alliances: Cambodia as Cultural Mirror," switches geographic locations from Java to Cambodia, where the author compares the "relationship of aesthetic projects to the construction of the nation-state identity" between Indonesia and Cambodia (p. 105). Since both countries contain histories of politically motivated violence toward their citizens, the comparison of national cultural expression such as official state-sponsored dance performances appears apt for critical analysis. Larasati argues that because the violence in Cambodia's political history is well acknowledged by the current government, the public, and the international community, the replication of traditional dances helps to commemorate the violence and its victims while asserting socio-psychological control over the unfortunate history by dictating the national narrative that acknowledges Cambodia's complex, albeit exoticized, history. By contrast, the replication of national dances in Indonesia today serves as a platform to subtly react to the oppression and silent narratives of historical violence while simultaneously reinforcing a historical silence regarding these atrocities.

Within the book's final chapter, the author turns more directly to her own positionality. In Chapter 5, "Violence and Mobility: Autoethnography of Coming and Going," Larasati grapples with one of the paradoxes with which she begins the book: the dissonant realization that through

research she simultaneously pursues a "critical, politicized line of discourse and thought while continuing to reap the benefits of civil service to an authoritarian state (and those of scholarship and performance within the often-rigid Western academic and arts establishments)" (p. 130). Reading this last chapter reminds me of a recent work by Jacqueline Siapno, *Gender, Islam, Nationalism and the State in Aceh*, which "provides an analysis of the different ways in which women have created spaces beyond the conventional and institutionalized practices of doing politics" (2016, x). Larasati contributes to this kind of discourse by directly engaging with institutionalized practices, but those that are fluid and expressive, i.e., state-sponsored dance. She examines dance as one of these "spaces beyond" while also demonstrating that dance performances are themselves simultaneously conventionalized and institutionalized. Larasati reveals that working from within these institutions through the expressive capacities of dance is a productive way to subvert hegemonic forces from within.

The book concludes with the author expressing her frustration that the UN convention of 1948 still does not recognize mass violence against a political group, however loosely defined, as "genocide." She ends by advocating for the position that the events of 1965–66 should indeed be considered genocide, a conclusion well argued throughout the book. *The Dance That Makes You Vanish* is an effective—and affective—introduction to a subject not sufficiently addressed in the past several decades of studies in Southeast Asia and world politics. Paired with other recent accounts, such as the 2012 documentary film *The Act of Killing*, this book is ideal for introducing discussions of genocide and political violence in undergraduate coursework. Furthermore, this book will be of interest to graduate students and scholars in many fields, including ethnomusicology, anthropology, and history, functioning well in advanced-level courses when paired with lengthier works on the subject of genocide and its historical ramifications and definitions throughout Southeast Asia and the world.

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